

The Disciples of Jesus

It is important to note that Jesus prayed to God before the calling of the twelve disciples.

Luke 6 ¹² And it came to pass in those days, that he went out into a mountain to pray, and continued all night in prayer to God. ¹³ And when it was day, he called unto him his disciples: and of them he chose twelve, whom also he named apostles; ¹⁴ Simon, (whom he also named Peter,) and Andrew his brother, James and John, Philip and Bartholomew, ¹⁵ Matthew and Thomas, James the son of Alphaeus, and Simon called Zelotes, ¹⁶ And Judas the brother of James, and Judas Iscariot, which also was the traitor.

Mark 3:13-19 **13** Jesus went up on a mountainside and called to him those he wanted, and they came to him. **14** He appointed twelve that they might be with him and that he might send them out to preach **15** and to have authority to drive out demons. **16** These are the twelve he appointed: Simon (to whom he gave the name Peter), **17** James son of Zebedee and his brother John (to them he gave the name Boanerges, which means “sons of thunder”), **18** Andrew, Philip, Bartholomew, Matthew, Thomas, James son of Alphaeus, Thaddaeus, Simon the Zealot **19** and Judas Iscariot, who betrayed him.

Who were the 12 disciples?

QUESTION: Who were the 12 disciples?

ANSWER:

[Luke 6:12-16](#) provides a list of the original followers of Jesus who were the 12 disciples: Simon (called Peter), his brother Andrew, James (the son of Zebedee), his brother John, Philip, Bartholomew/Nathanael, Matthew, Thomas, James (the son of Alphaeus), Simon (the Zealot) Judas/Thaddaeus (son of James), and Judas Iscariot. The word “disciple” refers to “a learner who accepts not only the views of the teacher, but one who attempts to put them into practice.”¹

Jesus used the term “disciple” in numerous references: a) the first twelve apostles ([Matthew 10:1](#)), b) Jews who became His followers ([John 6:66](#)), and c) all those who manifest that they are His “disciples” by abiding in His Word ([John 8:31](#)). In [Mark 3:14](#), Jesus sends the twelve apostles “out to preach and to have authority to drive out demons.” Following Judas Iscariot’s death, a replacement was needed. “Then they (disciples) cast lots, and the lot fell to Matthias; so he was added to the eleven apostles” ([Acts 1:26](#)). The word apostle means “one sent forth as a delegate or messenger.”²

In all three of the Synoptic Gospels, Jesus promises that, instead of catching fish, the first four, who were the 12 disciples, would be catching people.³ Simon Peter, Andrew, James, and John leave everything to follow Him. These four men would initiate the Christian community, symbolizing the success which was indicated by the miraculous catch of fish.

Peter, James, and John are chosen to form the inner core among Jesus’ disciples. They would accompany Him on occasions such as the healing of Jarius’ daughter ([Mark 5:22-48](#)) and the ascent of the mountain of Transfiguration ([Matthew 17:1-8](#)). Andrew appears more prominently in the fourth gospel where he is originally a follower of John the Baptist ([John 1:35-44](#)). It is Philip who invites Nathanael to meet Jesus. Philip was familiar with the Old Testament Scriptures ([Isaiah 42:1-4](#); [61:1-3](#)) so he was overjoyed to find “the one Moses wrote about in the Law, and about whom the prophets also wrote” ([John 1:45](#)).

Who were the 12 disciples – Their Qualities

Those, who were the 12 disciples, often exhibited qualities that seemed surprising. As a reviled publican, Matthew lovingly focused all of the attention on Jesus and away from himself. There is no indication of this disciple's authorship within the Gospel of Matthew. [Doubting Thomas](#) showed great devotion to following Jesus. Knowing the Jews' extreme hatred towards Jesus, Thomas expressed a readiness to die with Christ ([John 11:7-8, 16](#)). Thomas shows more modesty than Peter who wanted to know where Jesus was going. Thomas was more concerned to know the way ([John 13:36; 14:5](#)).

The Scriptures do not contain a vast amount of information on all of the disciples' lives. James' (the son of Alphaeus) mother was one of the "Mary's" who went to the tomb of Jesus and found the stone rolled away. Since Matthew was also the son of a man named Alphaeus, there is speculation that this "James" was his brother. Whether Simon was a zealot politically or religiously is not known. Thaddeus was also called 'Lebbacus' and 'Judas of James,' however since the name 'Judas' would not be a popular name, it may be the reason it was eliminated from the Gospels of Matthew and of Mark.

It is only fitting that of those who were the 12 disciples, Judas Iscariot, would be appear last (as it appears in the Scriptures). To call him a "disciple" seems inappropriate. Although [Judas betrayed](#) Him, Jesus' call to all His disciples was sincere. At the beginning, Jesus viewed Judas as a potential follower and disciple. Though Christ chose him, the Son of Man was never deceived. Sadly, Judas Iscariot fell from apostleship, never having had a genuine relationship with the Lord Jesus.

The Apostles of Jesus

As we study these courageous first-century lives, and what discipleship meant in the time of Jesus, we may expect to be aided in developing a Spirit-directed twenty-first century discipleship as Christ must have meant it to be.

The following biographical information about the 12 original disciples of Jesus uses the New Testament accounts along with the most respected legends and traditions. We do not mean to infer, that legend and tradition constitute historical fact. We do feel, however, that they do have value in the study of the lives of these men who "...turned the world upside down..."

Andrew

Andrew was the brother of Peter, and a son of Jonas. He lived in Bethsaida and Capernaum and was a fisherman before Jesus called him. Originally he was a disciple of John the Baptist (Mark 1:16-18). Andrew brought his brother, Peter, to Jesus (John 1:40). He is the first to have the title of Home and Foreign Missionary. He is claimed by three countries as their Patron Saint-Russia, Scotland and Greece. Many scholars say that he preached in Scythia, Greece and Asia Minor.

Andrew introduced others to Jesus. Although circumstances placed him in a position where it would have been easy for him to become jealous and resentful, he was optimistic and well content in second place. His main purpose in life was to bring others to the master.

According to tradition, it was in Achaia, Greece, in the town of Patra that Andrew died a martyr. When Governor Aepeas' wife was healed and converted to the Christian faith, and shortly after that the Governor's brother became a Christian. Aepeas was enraged. He arrested Andrew and condemned him to die on the cross. Andrew, feeling unworthy to be crucified on the same-shaped cross as his Master, begged that his be different. So, he was crucified on an X-shaped cross, which is still called Saint Andrew's cross and which is one of his apostolic symbols. A symbol of two crossed fish has also been applied to Andrew, because he was formerly a fisherman.

Bartholomew or Nathanael

Bartholomew Nathanael, son of Talmai, lived in Cana of Galilee. His apostolic symbol is three parallel knives. Tradition says he was a missionary in Armenia. A number of scholars believe that he was the only one of the 12 disciples who came from royal blood, or noble birth. His name means Son of Tolmai or Talmai(2 Samuel 3:3). Talmai was king of Geshur whose daughter, Maacah, was the wife of David, mother of Absalom.



Bartholomew's name appears with every list of the disciples (Matthew 10:3; Mark 3:18; Luke 6:14; Acts 1:13). This was not a first name, however; it was his second name. His first name probably was Nathanael, whom Jesus called "An Israelite indeed, in whom there is no guile" (John 1:47).

The New Testament gives us very little information about him. Tradition indicates he was a great searcher of the Scripture and a scholar in the law and the prophets. He developed into a man of complete surrender to the Carpenter of Nazareth, and one of the Church's most adventurous missionaries. He is said to have preached with Philip in Phrygia and Hierapolis; also in Armenia. The Armenian Church claims him as its founder and martyr. However, tradition says that he preached in India, and his death seems to have taken place there. He died as a martyr for his Lord. He was flayed alive with knives.

James the Elder

James, the Elder, Boanerges, son of Zebedee and Salome, brother of John the Apostle; a fisherman who lived in Bethsaida, Capernaum and Jerusalem. He preached in Jerusalem and Judea and was beheaded by Herod, AD 44 (Acts 12:1,2). He was a member of the Inner Circle, so called because they were accorded special privileges. The New Testament tells us very little about James. His name never appears apart from that of his brother, John. They were an inseparable pair (Mark 1:19-20; Matthew 4:21; Luke 5:1-11).

He was a man of courage and forgiveness, a man without jealousy, living in the shadow of John, a man of extraordinary faith. He was the first of the twelve to become a martyr. His symbol is three shells, the sign of his pilgrimage by the sea.

James the Lesser or the Younger

James, the Lesser or Younger, son of Alpheus, or Cleophas and Mary, lived in Galilee. He was the brother of the Apostle Jude.

According to tradition he wrote the Epistle of James, preached in Palestine and Egypt and was crucified in Egypt. James was one of the little-known disciples. Some scholars believe he was the brother of Matthew, the tax collector. James was a man of strong character and one of the most fiery type. Still another tradition says that he died as a martyr and his body was sawed in pieces. The saw became his apostolic symbol.

John

John Boanerges, son of Zebedee and Salome, brother of James, the Apostle. He was known as the Beloved Disciple. A fisherman who lived in Bethsaida, Capernaum and Jerusalem, he was a member of the Inner Circle. He wrote the Gospel of John, I John, II John, III John and Revelation. He preached among the churches of Asia Minor. Banished to the isle of Patmos, he was later freed and died a natural death. John was one of the prominent Apostles. He is mentioned in many places in the New Testament. He was a man of action; he was very ambitious; and a man with an explosive temper and an intolerant heart. His second name was Boanerges, which means son of Thunder. He and his brother, James, came from a more well-to-do family than the rest of the 12 Apostles. Since his father had hired servants in his fishing business (Mark 1:20) he may have felt himself above the rest. He was close to Peter. They were acting together in the ministry. Peter, however, was always the spokesman for the band.

John mellowed with time. At the latter part of his life, he had forgotten everything, including his ambition and explosive temper, except his Lord's command of love.

It is said that an attempt was made on his life by giving him a chalice of poison from which God spared him. He died of natural causes. A chalice with a snake in it is his symbol.

Judas

Judas Iscariot, the traitor, was the son of Simon who lived in Keriath of Judah. He betrayed Jesus for thirty pieces of silver and afterwards hanged himself (Matthew 26:14,16).

Judas, the man who became the traitor, is the supreme enigma of the New Testament because it is so hard to see how anyone who was so close to Jesus, who saw so many miracles and heard so much of the Master's teaching could ever betray him into the hands of his enemies.

His name appears in three lists of the 12 Apostles (Matthew 10:4; Mark 3:19; Luke 6:19). It is said that Judas came from Judah near Jericho. He was a Judean and the rest of the disciples were Galileans. He was the treasurer of the band and among the outspoken leaders.

It is said that Judas was a violent Jewish Nationalist who had followed Jesus in hope that through Him his nationalistic flame and dreams might be realized. No one can deny that Judas was a covetous man and at times he used his position as treasurer of the band to pilfer from the common purse. There is no certain reason as to why Judas betrayed his master; but it is not his betrayal that put Jesus on the cross-it was our sins. His apostolic symbol is a hangman's noose, or a money purse with pieces of silver falling from it.

Jude or Thaddeus

Jude, Thaddeus, or Lebbeus, son of Alpheus or Cleophas and Mary. He was a brother of James the Younger. He was one of the very little-known Apostles and lived in Galilee. Tradition says he preached in Assyria and Persia and died a martyr in Persia.

Jerome called Jude "Trinomious" which means "a man with three names." In Mark 3:18 he is called Thaddeus. In Matthew 10:3 he is called Lebbeus. His surname was Thaddeus. In Luke 6:16 and Acts 1:13 he is called Judas the brother of James. Judas Thaddeus also was called Judas the Zealot.

By character he was an intense and violent Nationalist with the dream of world power and domination by the Chosen People. In the New Testament records (John 14:22 NIV) he asked Jesus at the Last Supper, "But Lord, why do you intend to show yourself to us and not to the world?" Judas Thaddeus was interested in making Christ known to the world. Not as a suffering Saviour, however, but as ruling King. We can see plainly from the answer Jesus gave him, that the way of power can never be substituted for the way of love.

It is said that Jude went to preach the gospel in Edessa near the Euphrates River. There he healed many and many believed in the name of the Master. Jude went from there to preach the Gospel in other places. He was killed with arrows at Ararat. The chosen symbol for him is the ship because he was a missionary thought to be a fisherman.

Matthew or Levi

Matthew, or Levi, son of Alpheus, lived in Capernaum. He was a publican or tax collector. He wrote the Gospel that bears his name. He died a martyr in Ethiopia.

The call of Matthew to the apostolic band is mentioned in Mark 2:14, Matthew 9:9 and Luke 5:27-28. From these passages, we learn that Matthew also was called Levi. It was a common custom in the Middle East at the time of Christ for men to have two names. Matthew's names mean "a gift of God." The name Levi could have been given to him by Jesus. It is likely that James the lesser, who was one of the twelve Apostles, was Matthew's brother, also the son of Alpheus. Although we know little about Matthew personally, the outstanding fact about him is that he was a tax collector. The King James Version calls him a publican, which in Latin is Publicanus, meaning engaged in public service, a man who handled public money, or a tax gatherer.

Of all the nations in the world, the Jews were the most vigorous haters of tax gatherers. To the devout Jew, God was the only one to whom it was right to pay tribute in taxes. To pay it to anyone else was to infringe on the rights of God. The tax collectors were hated not on religious grounds only but because most of them were notoriously unjust.

In the minds of many honest, Jewish men, these tax collectors were regarded as criminals. In New Testament times they were classified with harlots, Gentiles and sinners (Matthew 18:17; Matthew 21:31, 33; Matthew 9:10; Mark 2:15,16; Luke 5:30). Tax collectors had been known to assess duty payable at impossible sums and

then offer to lend the money to travelers at a high rate of interest. Such was Matthew. Yet, Jesus chose a man all men hated and made him one of His men. It took Jesus Christ to see the potential in the tax collector of Capernaum.

Matthew was unlike the other Apostles, who were mostly fishermen. He could use a pen, and by his pen he became the first man to present to the world, in the Hebrew language, an account of the teaching of Jesus. It is clearly impossible to estimate the debt that Christianity owes to this despised tax gatherer. The average man would have thought it impossible to reform Matthew, but to God all things are possible. Matthew became the first man to write down the teachings of Jesus. He was a missionary of the Gospel, who laid down his life for the faith of his Master. The apostolic symbol of Matthew is three money bags which reminds us that he was a tax collector before Jesus called him.

Peter

Simon Peter, son of Jonas, was a fisherman who lived in Bethsaida and Capernaum. He did evangelistic and missionary work among the Jews, going as far as Babylon. He was a member of the Inner Circle and authored the two New Testament epistles which bear his name. Tradition says he was crucified, head downward, in Rome.

In every apostolic list, the name Peter is mentioned first. However, Peter had other names. At the time of Christ, the common language was Greek and the family language was Hebrew. So his Greek name was Simon (Mark 1:16; John 1:40, 41). His Hebrew name was Cephas (1 Corinthians 1:12; 3:22; 9:5 and Galatians 2:9). The Greek meaning of Simon is rock. The Arabic meaning of Cephas is also rock.

By trade, Peter was a fisherman. He was a married man (1 Corinthians 9:5) and his home was Capernaum. Jesus probably made His headquarters there when He visited Capernaum. Peter was also a Galilean as was typical of many of the other disciples. Josephus described the Galileans this way, "They were ever fond of innovation and by nature disposed to change and delighted in sedition. They were ever ready to follow the leader and to begin an insurrection. They were quick in temper and given to quarreling and they were very chivalrous men." The Talmud says this of the Galileans, "They were more anxious for honor than for gain, quick-tempered, impulsive, emotional, easily aroused by an appeal to adventure, loyal to the end."

Peter was a typical Galilean. Among the twelve, Peter was the leader. He stands out as a spokesman for all the twelve Apostles. It is he who asked the meaning of the difficult saying in Matthew 15:15. It is he who asked how often he must forgive. It is he who inquired about the reward for all of those who follow Jesus. It is he who first confessed Jesus and declared Him as the Son of the Living God. It is he who was at the Mount of Transfiguration. It is he who saw Jairus' daughter raised to life. Yet, it is he who denied Christ before a maiden. He was an Apostle and a missionary who laid down his life for his Lord. It is true, Peter had many faults, but he had always the saving grace of the loving heart. No matter how many times he had fallen and failed, he always recovered his courage and integrity.

Peter was martyred on a cross. Peter requested that he might be crucified head downward for he was not worthy to die as his Lord had died. His apostolic symbol is a cross upside down with crossed keys.

Philip

Tradition says that disciple Philip preached in Phrygia and died a martyr at Hierapolis. Philip came from Bethsaida, the town from which Peter and Andrew came (John 1:44). The likelihood is that he, too, was a

fisherman. Although the first three Gospels record his name (Matthew 10:3; Mark 3:18; Luke 6:14; Acts 1:13), it is in the Gospel of John that Philip becomes a living personality.

Scholars disagree on Philip. In Acts 6:5, we have Philip as one of the seven ordained deacons. Some say this is a different Philip. Some believe this is the Apostle. If this is the same Philip, then his personality came more to life because he had a successful campaign in Samaria. He led the Ethiopian eunuch to Christ (Acts 8:26). He also stayed with Paul in Ceasarea (Acts 21:8) and was one of the major figures in the missionary enterprise of the early church.

The Gospel of John shows Philip as one of the first to whom Jesus addressed the words, "Follow Me." When Philip met Christ, he immediately found Nathanael and told him that "we have found him, of whom Moses ... and the prophets, did write." Nathanael was skeptical. But Philip did not argue with him; he simply answered, "Come and see." This story tells us two important things about Philip. First, it shows his right approach to the skeptic and his simple faith in Christ. Second, it shows that he had a missionary instinct.

Philip was a man with a warm heart and a pessimistic head. He was one who would very much like to do something for others, but who did not see how it could be done. Yet, this simple Galilean gave all he had. In return God used him. It is said that he died by hanging. While he was dying, he requested that his body be wrapped not in linen but in papyrus for he was not worthy that even his dead body should be treated as the body of Jesus had been treated. The symbol of Philip is a basket, because of his part in feeding of the five thousand. It is he that stressed the cross as a sign of Christianity and victory.

Simon the Zealot

Simon, the Zealot, one of the little-known followers called the Canaanite or Zelotes, lived in Galilee. Tradition says he was crucified.

In two places in the King James Version he is called a Canaanite (Matthew 10:4; Mark 3:18). However in the other two places he is called Simon Zelotes (Luke 6:15; Acts 1:13).

The New Testament gives us practically nothing on him personally except that it says he was a Zealot. The Zealots were fanatical Jewish Nationalists who had heroic disregard for the suffering involved and the struggle for what they regarded as the purity of their faith. The Zealots were crazed with hatred for the Romans. It was this hate for Rome that destroyed the city of Jerusalem. Josephus says the Zealots were reckless persons, zealous in good practices and extravagant and reckless in the worst kind of actions.

From this background, we see that Simon was a fanatical Nationalist, a man devoted to the Law, a man with bitter hatred for anyone who dared to compromise with Rome. Yet, Simon clearly emerged as a man of faith. He abandoned all his hatred for the faith that he showed toward his Master and the love that he was willing to share with the rest of the disciples and especially Matthew, the Roman tax collector.

Simon, the Zealot, the man who once would have killed in loyalty to Israel, became the man who saw that God will have no forced service. Tradition says he died as a martyr. His apostolic symbol is a fish lying on a Bible, which indicates he was a former fisherman who became a fisher of men through preaching.

Thomas Didymus

Thomas Didymus lived in Galilee. Tradition says he labored in Parthia, Persia, and India, suffering martyrdom near Madras, at Mt. St. Thomas, India.

Thomas was his Hebrew name and Didymus was his Greek name. At times he was called Judas. Matthew, Mark and Luke tell us nothing about Thomas except his name. However, John defines him more clearly in his Gospel. Thomas appeared in the raising of Lazarus (John 11:2-16), in the Upper Room (John 14:1-6) where he wanted to know how to know the way where Jesus was going. In John 20:25, we see him saying unless he sees the nailprints in Jesus' hand and the gash of the spear in His side he will not believe. That's why Thomas became known as Doubting Thomas.

By nature, Thomas was a pessimist. He was a bewildered man. Yet, he was a man of courage. He was a man who could not believe until he had seen. He was a man of devotion and of faith. When Jesus rose, he came back and invited Thomas to put his finger in the nail prints in his hands and in his side. Here, we see Thomas making the greatest confession of faith, "My Lord and my God." Thomas' doubts were transformed into faith. By this very fact Thomas' faith became great, intense and convincing. It is said that he was commissioned to build a palace for the king of India, and he was killed with a spear as a martyr for his Lord. His symbol is a group of spears, stones and arrows.